JULY 2026

ROCK TALK

The Official Newsletter of the Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Ruby

Few words are as packed with meaning as “ruby.” While the word refers primarily to the natural ruby, it is also the preferred adjective for red colors of extraordinary intensity and purity. Its association with wealth and royalty conjures romantic images of kingdoms that once flourished in such historical ruby sources as Ceylon, Siam, Burma and India.

And Ruby continues to attract attention today. In June 2023, Sotheby’s, the New York City-based international auction house, auctioned off the largest transparent, gem-quality ruby ever faceted. The stunning, 55.22-carat, cushion-cut Estrela de FURA (Star of FURA) sold for $34.8 million ($630,288 per carat), a record for a colored gem. This spectacular ruby is notable not only for its size and beauty but also for its origin—a newly discovered, major deposit in the East African nation of Mozambique.

Ruby is a color variety of the mineral corundum or aluminum oxide. As an allochromatic (other-colored) mineral, corundum’s colors vary because of the presence of nonessential, color-causing agents called chromophores. Pure corundum is colorless. Red corundum is ruby; all other colors (including colorless) are sapphire. Ruby’s diagnostic red color is caused by traces of trivalent chromium, which absorb the non-red wavelengths of white light and reflect only the red wavelengths.

Most ruby occurs in metamorphic rocks. After weathering free from their host rocks, corundum gemstones are sufficiently dense (specific gravity 3.9-4.1) to form secondary alluvial concentrations (placer deposits) that may be of economic importance.

This Month's Roundup of Stories

- Ruby
- Secretary's Report
- July 2026 Announcements
- Blue Cap Tourmaline
- Moroccan Geodes
- Red Coral
- Labradorite
- Zoisite
- Bench tips

July’s Birthstone - Ruby

Transparency and color determine ruby value. The most desirable color is “pigeon’s blood,” an intense, pure red devoid of any bluish hint. Natural rubies always exhibit some color zoning and inclusions of tiny rutile needles. In sufficient quantity, the latter creates both a soft translucency known as “silk” and occasionally the asterism effect of star rubies.

During the Middle Ages, rubies were thought to promote good health and guard against wicked thoughts. Medieval physicians associated ruby with blood and treated heart ailments with potions of powdered ruby.

Read the entire article at *RockNGem.com*

Secretary's Report

Minutes and More from Club Secretary - Melodye Steverson

Withlacoochee Rockhounds Monthly Meeting - Minutes
Date 6-10-2026

The meeting was called to order by President Michael Steverson at 7:12pm.

We all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

There were no new members to recognize.
There were 4 guests in attendance: Luke Magneson & Lilly, Cassandra Marsh, and Janet Burcone.
Bill Litts made a motion to accept the minutes of our May meeting as printed in the newsletter, and Leslie Newberry seconded. Passed by all members.

Treasurer Janet Wheeler gave the Treasurer's report. Diane Hensley made a motion to accept the Treasurer's report, subject to audit. Seconded by Roberta Oldread. Approved by all.

President Steverson began with announcements;

Janice Wojcik is back this month and feeling better!
Our "Field Trip" insurance is in order and will begin on July 1st. We will start with local trips only.

Tonight's program will be "The Oco Geodes" by Vice President Chris Ward, who brought an Oco Geode to give to each member.
Next month's program, "Moroccan Geodes", will be presented by Leslie Newberry, and each member will be cracking open a geode to take home.

President Steverson continued, "Our club had a donation of rocks from the estate of a man who had lived in New Port Richey. Keth Luke had rocks collected from his travels piled up in his backyard. His sister, Linda Luke, contacted our club and asked us to come get them to share with our members. My wife and I (Michael & Melodye) drove down to pick up the donation, cleaned and prepared the rocks, and will be distributing some of them to members at the end of the program tonight."

Gem Show co-chairman Janice Wojcik announced that she will be sending out the vendor applications on July 1st this year, a month earlier than in past years. She also brought club member vendor applications to hand out to interested members at the meeting.

Isaac Mercado made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Roger Wheeler seconded, passed by all.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Secretary Melodye Steverson.

July 2026 Announcements

As announced at our last meeting and in last month's newsletter, the club now has insurance coverage for field trips. We will be working on coming up with some possible trips for the club to participate in. We'll judge where we might go based on club interest.

IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN!!! If you wish to apply for the club's "William Holland School for the Lapidary Arts" Scholarship Award for 2026, please pick up an application from the front table at the next meeting. Fill it out and give it to Secretary Steverson by/at the June meeting. The main requirements for consideration are that you have been a club member for 2 years, that you have been an active member during that time, and that you agree to give a presentation on what you learned or agree to teach a class or classes on what you learned at WHS. Applications will be considered by the Board and results will be announced soon.

A REMINDER

IF YOU ARE SICK OR HAVE RECENTLY BEEN SICK AND MAY STILL BE CONTAGIOUS, PLEASE DO NOT ATTEND OUR MEETING. THERE WERE SICK PEOPLE AT OUR JANUARY MEETING/PARTY, WHICH CAUSED OTHER MEMBERS TO BECOME ILL. THIS CAUSED SUFFERING, MEDICAL BILLS AND LOSS OF INCOME. BE CONSIDERATE OF YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS.

To all members: Your president and your Board of Directors are working diligently to plan and facilitate classes and training sessions for you to learn the skills you have shown an interest in. We are looking toward the future of our club and are excited by what we see. At the next two meetings, we will ask each member to fill out a very short questionnaire regarding what you would like to learn as a club member. This will help your Officers and Board know what you would enjoy.

Blue Cap Tourmaline: America's Gem

Blue cap crystals grow in lithium-rich pegmatites. The blue cap forms when the fluid chemistry changes during late-stage crystal growth. The body color can be pink, red, watermelon, green, or colorless and is caused by trace inclusions in the crystal. For instance, a pink body color is due to manganese, created when natural radiation slowly oxidizes Mn^{2+} ions over geologic time. The very tip is sky blue to deep electric blue. This is caused when the chemistry shifts, and iron becomes more important. The balance between different forms of iron changes how the crystal absorbs light, blocking out other colors and letting rich blues shine through.

Blue caps are associated with other minerals such as quartz, lepidolite, albite, cleavelandite and other tourmalines. They are famously found in California, along with Brazil and less commonly in Afghanistan and Namibia.

In the hills of San Diego County, tourmaline once caused a mineral rush that captured imaginations. Local Native Americans valued the stones long before miners arrived, but by the late 1800s, San Diego was swept up in a "tourmaline rush." Tiffany & Co. bought gems by the wagonload, and Chinese agents shipped vivid pinks and greens to Beijing for Empress Cixi, who adored them and had fine crystals carved into snuff bottles, jewelry and luxury wares. Even today, you can still see reminders of that era in San Diego's street names: Garnet, Beryl and Feldspar.

A few blue caps surfaced more than a century ago, between around 1898 and 1902, and only a few important specimens have been preserved. The most famous strike came when jeweler Edward Swoboda and miner Bill Larson uncovered legendary pockets at the historic Tourmaline Queen Mine.

In 1972, Larson worked late into the evening at the mine. With only a flashlight for light, he carefully chipped away at clay and rock until a remarkable formation emerged: a branching mass of pink-and-blue elbaite anchored by quartz. Lifting it free, he realized he had uncovered what would become known as the "Candelabra." Today, this masterpiece resides in the Smithsonian and is one of the finest mineral specimens ever recovered.

Read the article at RockNGem.com

You liked geodes so much, we're doing it again!
Club Board member, Leslie Newberry will be giving us a presentation on Moroccan geodes.
Everything you wanted to know about Moroccan geodes, but were afraid to ask!
We'll be cracking them open to find what's inside.
At the conclusion of the program, everyone gets an opened geode to take home with them

Clubhouse Address:
3357 Susan Dr
Spring Hill, FL 34606

Red Coral: Italy's Ruby of the Sea

Red coral is among the iconic products of Italy, alongside Murano glass, limoncello, and handmade pasta. Precious red coral is known as red gold and the ruby of the sea. It is valued for its saturated red color, lustrous polish, and unusual marine origin. Its rich lore predates Roman times. And the qualifier "precious" is not pretentious. Today, a single pound of top-grade, rough red coral as taken from the sea sells for about $3,000.

But while red coral has a long and colorful past, its future is uncertain. Overharvesting has depleted many red coral colonies. The polyp that produces red coral is now an endangered species. Although many regulations now protect the Mediterranean's red coral beds, illegal harvesting remains a threat. Compounding this problem is a flood of imitations that undermines the genuine red coral market.

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Greek mythology attributes the origin of red coral to the tale of Medusa and Perseus. After Medusa, a beautiful young woman, fell in love with the sea god Poseidon, the two foolishly made love on sacred ground belonging to the goddess Athena. Infuriated by such disrespect, Athena transformed Medusa into an ugly, snake-haired creature. She was so hideous that anyone who looked directly at her turned to stone.

Ordered by the king of gods, Zeus, to kill Medusa, the hero and monster-slayer Perseus succeeded by cleverly looking only at her reflection in his polished, bronze shield as he wielded his sword. After beheading Medusa, Perseus tossed her head into the sea. Her blood petrified the seaweed and turned it to red coral.

Read the entire article at
GeologyScience.com

Collecting AuSable River Labradorite

Labradorite is a variety of plagioclase feldspar that is dark gray to black in ordinary or low light, but it often has a brilliant play of colors when the right surfaces are exposed to sunlight. These colors result from a type of iridescence that occurs in labradorite feldspar, so it is often referred to as labradorescence. The colors can be vibrant and include blue, green and gold, and the colors shift as the mineral is moved. Labradorite with good color, also known as schiller, is a highly desirable gemstone.

Labradorite was known to the ancient Inuit people of the Arctic, who noted its resemblance to the Northern Lights. In 1771, a Moravian missionary in Nain, Jens Havens, sent some of the colorful stones to Germany. They were called “Labrador stein,” and some pieces were also sent to England, where they were called “Labrador stone” or “firestone.” The German geologist Abraham Werner thought they were a new mineral species, and in 1820, the French mineralogist François-Sulpice Bedant determined the rocks were feldspars with the characteristics of albite and anorthite and named the rock “labradorite.”

Many attempts were made to quarry labradorite, but the remote locations of the quarries and harsh weather made it difficult. The first reported attempt at commercial quarrying was in 1896, and the last operating quarry, which was in Nain, closed in 2010. The mining and collecting activities at Tabor Island, which was likely the original source of labradorite, are strictly controlled by the Labrador Inuit Association. These locations are remote and can only be reached by boat or helicopter.

While its name is from Labrador, labradorite is found worldwide. Notable occurrences are in Norway, Finland, Iceland, China, Australia, Slovakia, Poland, Mexico, Italy, Russia and Madagascar. Ironically, Madagascar labradorite is often sold in Canada and marketed as labradorite from Labrador. While the Madagascar labradorite is also a similar feldspar with color, it is not from Labrador. If you purchase any labradorite, be sure to stick with a reputable dealer and be aware that it may not be from Labrador.

In the United States, labradorite is found in California, Oregon and northern New York. Oregon occurrences are reportedly mainly sunstone, which is desirable but not exactly labradorite. However, Northern New York has many sites with labradorite. While it is not comparable to the quarry sources in Labrador and Madagascar, it is more accessible and relatively easy to find.

The Ausable River drains the northeastern Adirondacks before emptying into Lake Champlain and flows through some of the most scenic parts of the Adirondacks. The river drains many sections of Adirondack bedrock, including the Marcy Massif. The Marcy Massif is primarily anorthosite, which is an intrusive rock that is mainly calcium plagioclase feldspar. The Marcy Massif has sections with the right composition to form labradorite.

Read the article at *RockNGem.com*

Zoisite: Ruby Rock to Tanzanite Gem

Zoisite is a versatile mineral that occupies a unique place in the world of lapidary materials and gemstones. Found most often as a massive mineral, it is best known for its striking red-and-green ruby-zoisite combinations, its carved decorative uses, and its role as the parent mineral of the gem tanzanite. Few minerals display such a wide range of colors, forms, and applications.

First introduced to the collecting and lapidary community in the mid-20th century, zoisite attracted immediate attention through material recovered in East Africa. The distinctive green host rock, frequently containing sharply formed red ruby crystals, proved abundant and highly workable. Its bold color contrast and durability made it especially appealing for cabochons, carvings, and ornamental pieces, quickly establishing it as a staple in lapidary shops and mineral collections.

Massive varieties are typically green and slightly granular in appearance, but their most visually dramatic form occurs when vivid red ruby crystals are embedded within the green host rock. These rubies commonly appear as well-formed hexagonal crystals ranging from opaque to translucent, sharply contrasting with the surrounding zoisite. Scattered throughout the material are small black spots and needlelike crystals, once identified as hornblende, adding a third color element to the stone.

Some ruby terminations reach several inches across, and where the crystal ends are exposed, and slightly translucent, polished domes can display a subtle chatoyant shimmer. Although free-standing ruby crystals are absent, the natural red-and-green pairing proved immediately attractive to lapidary artists.

The discovery of zoisite-ruby rock happened in 1949 when an English prospector named Tom Blevins worked in Tanzania. While prospecting, he came across a deposit of large opaque ruby crystals. He immediately staked claims — in hopes he could make a fortune if some of the rubies proved to be gemmy and could be cut. However, luck was not on his side.

The deposit was part of a substantial regional metamorphic area composed mainly of schists and marble formations. Mining commenced on the deposit in hopes that deeper mining would reveal gem crystals. That did not happen.

Read the entire article at ***RockNGem.com***

Field Trips

We have finally secured field trip insurance for the club!
More on the insurance coverage will be explained at the meetings, but suffice to say, we are now covered when we want to do club-sanctioned field trips!
Thank you for being patient while we worked on this.

Monthly Meeting Courtesy

Our monthly meetings are a time for members to get together to share their love of rocks, minerals and fossils. It is a chance to learn from each other, teach each other and bond with people that have common interests. It's also a time for the club to conduct a business meeting, during which club Officers and Directors inform club members of changes that have happened or are proposed to happen in the future to club procedure or rules.

It is a time for announcements of coming classes, programs, scholarships, and special events. It may be a time for discussion on a topic if it is of concern to a majority of members present. Members may also share experiences and news of interest to other members. Our monthly meetings should always be a time of sharing, education and entertainment.

We should all show respect and consideration for each other at our meetings, especially for the Facilitator of the meeting, whether it be our President or one of our other Officers. This respect has been lacking in our meetings for several months now. A few attendees have been speaking out without being recognized, shouting, and making inappropriate comments. This not only disrupts our meetings but makes members, new and old, feel uneasy and uncomfortable. It makes our club seem very unprofessional and is disrespectful to the Officers, Directors, and your fellow members.

Going forward, our Board has decided to strive for a more business-like atmosphere while our business meetings are in order. If you are an attending member and have a question or comment, please raise your hand and wait to be recognized by the Facilitator of the meeting. After you are acknowledged and speak, if you later have something else to add, please raise your hand and again be recognized to speak. Please be respectful and polite when you are addressing the Officers and Directors, who volunteer their time, work tirelessly, and make every effort to keep this club alive and prosperous.

We feel this will make for a smoother meeting with all members being heard. No members will be shouted over and no members will feel over run with chaotic outbursts. We will all feel a part of the meeting and will learn more about what our club is doing for and with us.

Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Our monthly club meeting is held at the Weeki Wachee Senior Citizens Club, 3357 Susan Dr., Spring Hill, FL 34606, on the 2nd Wednesday of each month from 7:00 to 9:00 PM

www.withlacoocheerockhounds.com

Your Business Card Size Ad in Rock Talk

The cost for non-club members to advertise their businesses in Rock Talk is $10.00 per month. Contact Michael Steverson to set up an ad in both the newsletter and the club website. It will benefit both your business and our club.

Advertisers Needed

Please help us find advertisers for the *Rock Talk* and our website. The club can use the monthly income. Both the *Rock Talk* and our website have more exposure than only club members

Contact club treasure Janet Wheeler: ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com or send to: Withlacoochee Rockhounds PO Box 5634 Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634

Withlacoochee Rockhounds

Purpose

We are a non-profit organization whose purpose is to foster interest and promote knowledge of minerals, gems, fossils, lapidary arts, and earrth sciences, through regular meetings, informative programs, and workshops. PLUS, our annual gem, mineral and jewelry show.

Membership is open to anyone sharing such interests.

Dues

Dues are $35.00 annually for adults, and $5.00 for children under 18 years of age.

Club Meeting Location and Time

Weeki Wachee Senior Citizens Center, 3375 Susan Dr in Spring Hill. Meetings are held the second Wednesday of the month at 7:00PM

2026 Club Officers and Appointees

President	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com .com
Vice President	Chris Ward	818.439.0217	chris_ward678@yahoo.com
Secretary	Melodye Steverson	352.683.9496	melodye@designsbymelodye.com
Treasurer	Janet Wheeler	727.938.3644	ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com
Rock Talk Editor	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com
Club Webmaster	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com
Mailing Reporter	Janet Wheeler	727.938.3644	ceegirl@tampabay.rr.com
Audio/Visual Coordinator	Michael Steverson	407.376.5570	highlander56@gmail.com

Michael Steverson (President) Chris Ward (Vice President) Melodye Steverson (Secretary) Janet Wheeler (Treasurer)
Hunter Mellring Leslie Newberry Roger Wheeler Janice Wojcik (Vendor Co-chair) Ralph Barber (Past President)

Bench Tips from Brad Smith

Brad Smith's *Bench Tips* are a monthly feature of Rock Talk

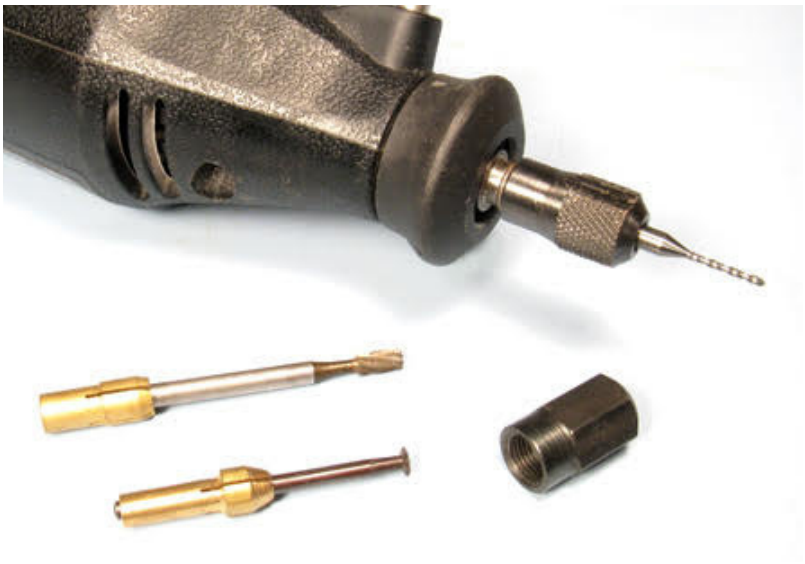
DRILL BREAKAGE

Using a small drill is difficult for a beginner, especially if it's handheld in a flexshaft or a Dremel. Bits can easily break with too much pressure or if they tilt a little while in the hole.

Most problems, however, are the result of buying cheap drills that suffer from poor quality steel and/or inaccurately ground cutting edges. A good drill from jewelry supply companies is well worth the price.

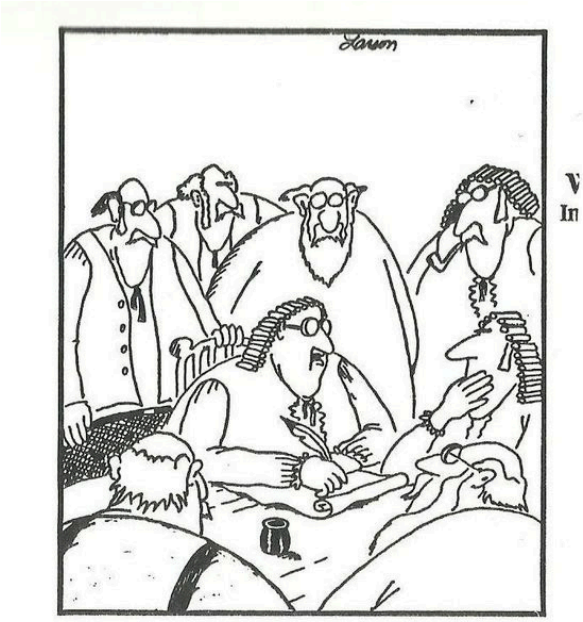
Remember that drilling always goes easier with lubrication. A little wax or oil is all you need. Almost anything will work - Three and One, beeswax, mineral oil, injection wax, car oil, olive oil, or one of the commercial cutting waxes.

The lubricant helps to move chips out of the hole and reduces friction of the drill against the side of the hole, keeping the drill cooler.



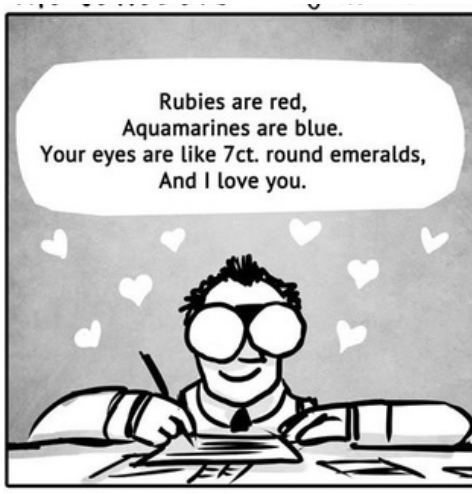
Learn New Skills with Brad's "How To Do It" Books
Amazon.com/author/bradfordsmith

Rock Talk Funny Papers

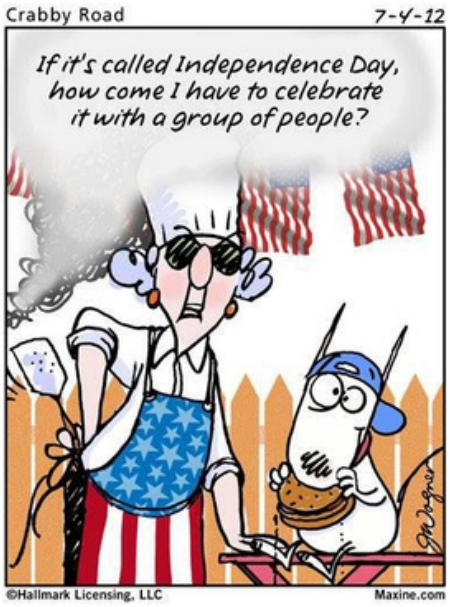


"So, then. ...Would that be 'us the people' or 'we the people'?"

Just discovered: A rare photo of Willie Nelson and Keith Richards taken during the construction of the Pyramids.



A jeweler's love poem.


Crabby Road
7-4-12
If it's called Independence Day, how come I have to celebrate it with a group of people?
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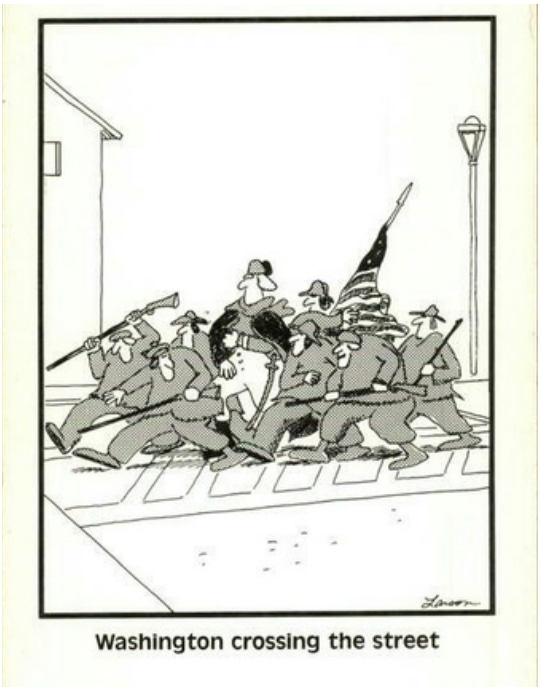
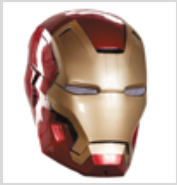


Washington crossing the street



From The Editor

Hello to all Withlacoochee Rockhounds

It is I, your friendly neighborhood editor again.

For our June meeting, club Vice President Chris Ward gave us a presentation on Oco Geoedes from Brazil. Everyone took home a geode of their own when he had concluded the presentation.

And....Leslie Newberry is giving us a presentation on geodes for our July meeting. We're planning on cutting open, or cracking open the geodes from her presentation.

And, is that Cabalot coming up I see? Yep, it's just around the corner!

Lots of stuff coming up!

If you would like to place a business card ad in the newsletter, please feel free to contact me, and we'll get you added to the next available issue.

Additionally, if any of you have not received your newsletter or are not receiving my e-mail blasts (meetings, rock sales, etc.), *please* check your spam folder. If you are still not receiving them, please contact me, and let's make sure I have your correct e-mail address.

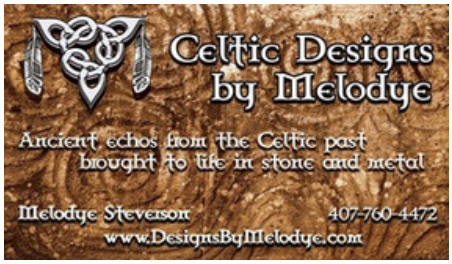
Our Board would like our members to come up with suggestions for programs to be presented at our monthly meetings. What would you like to see? What would you like to learn? What would you like to know? Is there something you'd like to teach or present? You can help our club expand its educational repertoire. We'd love to hear from you all.
Contact any Board member or bring your written suggestions to a meeting.

Rock On!!! Club Phone Number - 352.587.2714

Warning to Withlacoochee Rockhound Members

During the last several months, illicit requests have been sent to members of various clubs in the US, including the Withlacoochee Rockhounds, asking members to purchase gift cards that would be used as donations to various organizations.
These are SCAMS.
Be advised that our club has never and will never ask members to buy gift cards or provide any form of monitary funds to anyone or any organization by phone call, email, or any other method of communication.

Rockhounds Advertisers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NOT YOUR AVERAGE ROCK SHOP
Show Your Rockhounds Club Membership Card for a Discount

Your Business Card Size Ad in Rock Talk

The costfor non-club members to advertisetheirbusinesses in Rock Talk is $10.00 per month.
Contact Michael Steverson to set up an ad in both the newsletter and the club website. It will benefit both your business and our club.

If your ad has a web address, or Etsy shop address, I have linked to it.

Advertisers Are Needed
Please help us find advertisers for the Rock Talk and our website.
The monthly income from these ads is beneficial to the club.
Both the Rock Talk and our website have more exposure than only club members.
Contact club treasurer Janet Wheeler: ceecgirl@tampabay.rr.com or send to:
Withlacoochee Rockhounds
PO Box 5634 Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634

Membership Form - 2026

Withlacoochee Rockhounds
Hernando County FL

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Full Name _____

Partner's Full Name
* If both applying for membership _____

Child's Full Name
* If under 18, and applying with parent _____

Street Address _____

City _____

State / ZIP _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Annual Membership Dues:

*Choose your type of membership

- ☐ Individual Membership $35.00/ea
- ☐ Individual Membership $35.00/ea
- ☐ Under 18 Membership $5.00/ea
- ☐ Under 18 Membership $5.00/ea

☐ Returning Member?

☐ New Member?

If you are applying, for example, as husband, wife and child (under 18), then fill in full name, partner's name and child's name above. Then, choose two individual memberships to the left, along with an under 18 membership.

Give this completed form, along with your check (made payable to "Withlacoochee Rockhounds") or credit card for dues to Club Secretary Janet Wheeler at a club meeting. Or, you may mail the form to:

Withlacoochee Rockhounds
PO Box 5634
Spring Hill, FL 34611-5634